



LAYMAN'S REPORT

LIFE ALPILLES PROJECT • [LIFE12 NAT/FR/000107] • 2013-2019

Birds, landscapes and people



A partnership to reconcile people with their environment

€2.4M
for the Alpilles Regional
Natural Park territory

This ambitious programme is co-funded by the European Union (75 %) and the Bouches-du-Rhône Departmental Council, the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur Regional Council, the French government (Regional Directorate for Environment, Planning and Housing (DREAL)), as well as self-financed by the Park and partner beneficiaries (25 %).

What is LIFE?

LIFE is the EU funding instrument for the environment, which is utilised for the purposes of its environmental policy. This programme implements projects that further the conservation of the environment, the climate and nature. Over 4 500 projects have been co-funded through this instrument since 1992. The LIFE Alpilles project is part of the LIFE+ Nature and Biodiversity component, which promotes projects that implement European Habitats and Birds directives and the management of NATURA 2000 sites.

The LIFE Alpilles project (2013-2019) is backed and managed by the Alpilles Regional Natural Park. It develops actions that favour 13 bird species found in this range, some of which, such as Bonelli's Eagle and the Egyptian Vulture, are among the rarest and most threatened species in France.

The actions are focused as much on the conservation of birdlife as on the promotion of human activities, including tourism, agriculture, and livestock farming, which contribute to the presence of these species in the Park. By combining the two kinds of interventions, the project responds to three major objectives:

- Optimise the interconnection between human activities and the maintenance of ornithological biodiversity;
- Encourage local stakeholders to take account of ecological issues;
- Strengthen the ornithological reputation of this area by promoting certain practices.



ir environment

A Natura 2000 site, scope of action for the LIFE Alpilles project

The actions within this LIFE project were carried out on the Natura 2000 Alpilles site, a Special Protection Area under the Birds Directive, which is about half of the total area of the Regional Natural Park. They address protection and management issues in favour of these 13 bird species of community interest.

The Natura 2000 network is a group of European terrestrial and marine sites, which have been identified for the rarity or the fragility of their wild animal or plant species and of their habitats. Natura 2000 reconciles nature conservation with socio-economic activities. The Park manages activities at 2 Natura 2000 sites within its bounds.

A project that succeeds by mobilising multiple stakeholders within the territory

To assist the Alpilles Regional Natural Park, the following six local partner organisations contributed to the achievement of actions in the pluriannual project through direct support and in their capacities as associated beneficiaries:

- The PACA Bird Protection League (LPO PACA);
- The Alps-Mediterranean Centre for Pastoral Studies and Projects (CERPAM)
- The Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur Natural Area Conservancy (CEN PACA);
- The A Rocha France Association;
- The Alpilles Hunting Management Group (GIC des Alpilles);
- The Professional Olive Growers Group of the Baux valley (GOPVB).

Around forty actions that provide benefits for this territory were completed during the project, in four complementary areas ranging from surveys to concrete management actions and the subsequent promotional actions that make use of various communication tools.

In addition to the associated beneficiaries, the European project made it possible to establish relationships with numerous local partners, associations, local authorities, Chambers of Commerce, Agriculture and Guilds, and educational organisations.



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The Alpilles, remarkable and

The Alpilles Regional Natural Park

Given the status of regional natural park in 2007, this small Mediterranean territory of 50 000 ha features a central limestone massif rising to 498 m. The Alpilles are recognised for the diversity of their habitats and landscapes, which include forest and garrigue, rocky habitats, dry grasslands, wetlands and traditional farmland. The natural and cultural (bio)diversity of the Alpilles, shaped by over 4 000 years of history, makes it a remarkable place.

There are 16 communes in the Alpilles Park, which have contributed actively to the project and benefit from the direct impacts of this project on their territory: Aureille, Lamanon, Eyguières, Eygalières, Saint-Rémy-de-Provence, Saint-Étienne-du-Grès, Mas-Blanc-des-Alpilles, Les-Baux-de-Provence, Fontvieille, Paradou, Maussane-les-Alpilles, Mouriès, Sénas, Orgon, Saint-Martin-de-Crau and Tarascon.

Species targeted by the LIFE Alpilles project:

- 1 Bonelli's Eagle
- 2 Eurasian Eagle Owl
- 3 European Nightjar
- 4 Tawny Pipit
- 5 Little Bustard
- 6 Short-toed Snake Eagle
- 7 Lesser Kestrel
- 8 European Roller
- 9 Eurasian Scops Owl
- 10 Egyptian Vulture
- 11 Dartford Warbler
- 12 Woodlark
- 13 Ortolan Bunting



vulnerable

Why is there a LIFE project in the Alpilles?

As is the case with most rural territories today, the Alpilles are confronted with a wide range of pressures and transformations in areas such as changing land use, agriculture, and visitor numbers, as well as urban planning.

At the territorial level, the Alpilles Regional Natural Park and its partners aim to find solutions that will integrate environmental issues into various policies and projects as well as into human practices and activities such as leisure, agriculture and grazing. The LIFE project fits in with this approach by targeting all of the subjects taken up in the Park. As human activities have a direct and indirect impact on preserving the environment, the LIFE project has been a powerful lever for reaching these objectives and starting numerous partnerships for sustaining these actions.



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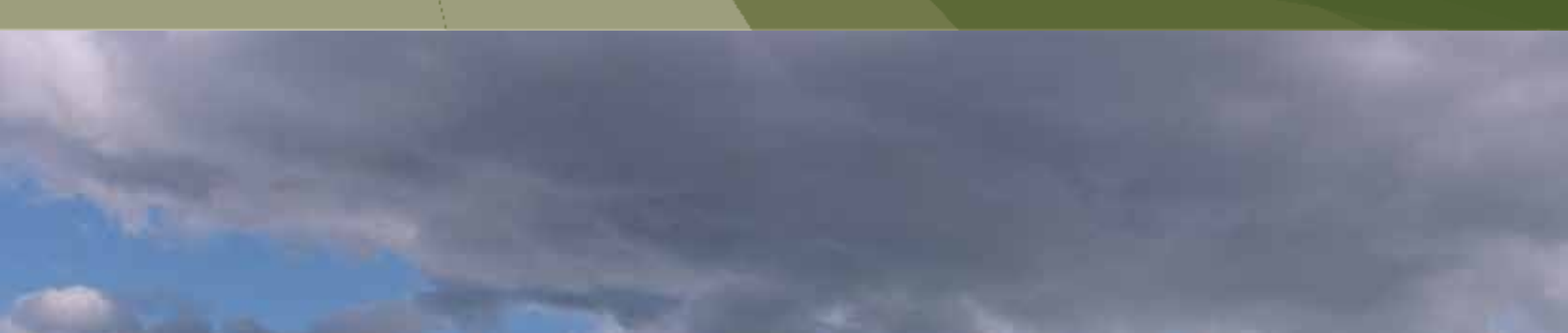


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Towards sustainable farming

Promoting alternative farming practices

One of the major actions of the LIFE Alpilles project is to set up and monitor alternative farming practices that favour biodiversity and are economically profitable in the four primary agricultural sectors in the territory: olive growing, wine growing, grain growing and fruit tree orchards.



BIRDS CONCERNED

European Roller,
Eurasian Scops Owl,
Woodlark,
Little Bustard

Training and technical follow-up

An inventory of the current farming practices as well as a survey of the needs of farmers in the Alpilles were carried out on 40 farms. This preparatory action made it possible to identify the practices that should be promoted in the framework of training and experience sharing days. In addition, with the assistance technicians, about a dozen voluntary farmers set up plots to test out alternative practices. A technical and socio-economic report have enabled us to understand the obstacles and opportunities encountered.

Subjects investigated

- The sustainable management of soil and the role of plant cover;
- The diversification of agrosystems: maintaining or planting hedges and strips of plant cover within crop fields;
- Varietal choice and crop rotation: selecting varieties of hard wheat (durum wheat) and companion cropping;
- Alternatives to pesticides and herbicides: mechanical weeding, spraying kaolin clay to control the Olive Fruit Fly and other techniques.

To encourage farmers to make these changes, it is indispensable to help them clearly understand the ecological and agronomic issues related to these practices, while linking them to the economic viability of their farms.

The European forum on alternative farming practices

A total of nearly 160 farmers, professionals from the world of farming, and politicians participated in these two days of exchanges on farming practices that are favourable to biodiversity and in particular to birdlife. This meeting made it possible to present and share experiences, and to open the debate on what will come after the LIFE



Innovation in the Park thanks to LIFE

The LIFE Alpilles project has made it possible to develop a prototype of a clay spraying machine to control the Olive Fruit Fly. The results were considered to be promising on about 30 hectares sprayed.

Alpilles project. This forum focused on the following objectives:

- Raise the awareness of local stakeholders about the ecological issues linked to farming;
- Provide information about the associations and technical organisations that are competent in this domain;
- Present concrete examples with feedback from France and Europe.

Technical Partners: Group of Professional Oliver Growers from the Baux Valley, TERO, Karim Riman, AGRIBIO 13 and 04, Organic Farming Research Group, Bio de Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur, SOLAGRO, voluntary farmers, A ROCHA France, Techni Phyto Conseil, CIL, CIVAM, AGROOF, CTIFL, INRA

4 sectors concerned: olive growing, wine growing, cereal growing and orchards.

40 farms surveyed

12 voluntary farmers who participated in experiments on their farms

18 training and information-sharing days

242 participants attended the training and information-sharing days

160 people attended the European Forum on alternative farming practices





BIRDS CONCERNED

European Roller,
Eurasian Scops Owl,
Woodlark,

6500 m of hedges have been
planted on 17 estates
in 9 communes of the
Alpilles (206 m by students from the Alpilles
agricultural high school)

30 years, the duration of the contract
to maintain planted hedges signed
by volunteer landowners

Restoration of the network of hedges

Hedges are essential for the biological diversity of agrosystems and farms. They fill several functions according to whether they are resinous or deciduous:

- Environmental: a site for wildlife for resting, feeding, breeding, and moving (concept of an ecological corridor).
- Agronomic: soil fertility, erosion control, protection against the wind, a shelter for auxiliary insects for crops;
- Production: construction wood, fodder;
- Social: landscapes, odour filter;

Over the past 50 years, the Alpilles Natura 2000 site has lost 28 % of its network of hedges.

Since the beginning of the European project, the hedges in the Alpilles have been studied in order to characterise the state of the network in this territory and to propose concrete actions to restore, maintain and diversify them.

Within the scope of these actions, more than 6 km of hedges have been planted in a partnership with around twenty landowners. The aim of developing birdlife-friendly habitats is linked to considerable awareness-raising of farmers, communes, and the public about the multiple interests of hedges. It is indispensable to make people understand the issues linked to their destruction in order to limit future hedge removal.

Technical partners: Naturalia Environnement, A Rocha France, the Valabre agricultural high school in Gardanne and the one in the Alpilles (Saint-Rémy-de-Provence), the MSc programme in terrestrial environment at Aix-Marseille University (focusing on ecological expertise and biodiversity management), voluntary landowners, Jérôme Bolea, Pépinière du Luberon, Biodiv, Guillon Frères.





Better forest management

The LIFE project has made it possible to unite all forest management stakeholders in order to draw up recommendations in the various management documents that concern bird conservation issues.

From awareness raising...

Nearly half of the Alpilles Park is made up of natural areas, 64 % forests (pine and garrigue).

According to the nature and size, forest areas may require the establishment of:

- Forest management plans for communal forests managed by the French National Forest Office (ONF).
- So called Simple Management Plans drawn up for any private forest property over 25 ha.
- The "Code of good silvicultural practices" for smaller forest properties, signed on a voluntary basis.

This broad-based concertation enabled landowners and their partners to take on board key issues linked to the preservation of biodiversity. To accomplish that goal, the Park has drafted an ecological management recommendations guide and organised appropriate training for politicians.

... to implementation

Many work meetings have enabled us to achieve the following operations:

- Thinning out young Aleppo Pines to reduce the density of trees to favour the best individuals and the good development of the tree crowns that are good for bird nesting (33.7 ha).
- The establishment of old-growth stands to conserve the biodiversity linked to holes and flaking bark (birds, bats and insects). The landowners made a commitment to not make any cuts there for 30 years.

Technical partners: French National Forest Office, Regional Forest Property Centre, Provence Forêt (forest owners' cooperative), forest owners, communes, MTDA, Macagno.

BIRDS CONCERNED

*Short-toed Snake Eagle,
Woodlark,
European Nightjar*

3000 ha of forest covered
by ecological
management measures

7 old-growth stands





BIRDS CONCERNED

Eurasian Eagle Owl,
Bonelli's Eagle,
Egyptian Vulture,
Dartford Warbler,
Woodlark, ...

8 communal grazing plans
covering a total area of 19 000 ha

170 10 ha of garrigue re-opened

10 management plans (1 for each
livestock area identified)

Livestock farming: a traditional activity we must maintain

For open habitats

Livestock farming is an emblematic activity in the Alpilles, which is crucial for maintaining the biodiversity and landscapes there. With nearly 6000 ha of pastures, it can be considered an economy in itself. The landscapes are like a mosaic, with open (dry grassland), semi-open (garrigue), and closed (forest) habitats, so they can host a wide variety of bird species. The LIFE project enabled an inventory of the current situation and to formulate livestock management recommendations for this territory through the drawing up of communal grazing plans for 8 municipalities. Through a study of the vacant grazing areas and the potential for using them, this work also made it possible to identify the sectors in which it is necessary to relaunch grazing activities.

Achievements

- Formerly open habitats were restored through brush removal operations;
- A management and maintenance plan was put in place for habitats opened up through grazing: complete documents on livestock farming and ecological issues drafted.
- Communes made a commitment to not changing the orientation of these habitats, e.g. no afforestation or urbanisation for the next 30 years.
- Targeted scientific monitoring of birds was conducted and technical assistance given for livestock farmers at each site to put into perspective the actions and their impacts on wildlife.

Technical partners: Alps-Mediterranean Centre for Pastoral Studies and Projects (CERPAM), French National Forest Office, Alpilles Hunting Management Group (GIC des Alpilles), hunting clubs, the communes, Provence Forêts, Rieu, Dolza, Alpine des bois, Alcina, Satal, Alpilles terrassements.

Egyptian Vulture © B. Berthermy





Hunting and biodiversity

In parallel to its actions for reopening habitats, the Alpilles Regional Natural Park has worked with local hunting clubs for the purposes of preserving small game species.

Protecting the Red-legged Partridge and the European Rabbit

The European Rabbit and the Red-legged Partridge play an important role in the Mediterranean ecosystem as a prey species for large raptors like Bonelli's Eagle and the Eurasian Eagle Owl. They are also significant game species that are traditionally hunted in the region.

Management plan

Decimated by disease and closed habitats, an inventory and then a management plan were made for these two species. Information on hunting in the Alpilles was gathered for that purpose and recommendations were made for their sustainable management.

Achievements

In the areas that were cleared for the purpose of reopening habitats, small fields with diverse vegetation were created and will be maintained by the hunters themselves. Different installations were built in favour of the two small game species. Hunters helped to create rabbit warrens and to install cages to release partridge. These actions will contribute to increase the natural populations of rabbits and partridges. They are part of a mutually beneficial relationship that includes the monitoring of prey and bird populations and continued awareness-raising of hunters concerning these large raptors. Site maintenance is taken care of by the hunters themselves.

Technical partners: The Alpilles Hunting Management Group (GIC des Alpilles), the French National Hunting and Wildlife Office (ONCFS), hunting clubs, the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur Natural Area Conservancy, French National Forest Office, landowners, communes, Heiter, Alpilles terrassements, Satal.

BIRDS CONCERNED
*Bonelli's Eagle,
Eurasian Eagle Owl*

1000 rabbits reintroduced.
Construction of 14 groups of warrens with a central enclosed warren and 4 small warrens

300 Red-legged Partridges released.
Installation of 15 pre-release cages for Red-legged Partridges.

250 trees or shrubs planted close to the 5 ha of small fields created





Better knowledge and conservation of birds in the Alpilles

Of the species concerned by the LIFE project, some are particularly endangered in the Alpilles range and they are all threatened in Europe. It is therefore crucial to improve the conditions favourable for maintaining and increasing their numbers in the Alpilles.



The webtool atlas of birdlife issues in the Alpilles Special Protection Area was compiled to inform project-executing organisations as well as the general public about the presence of species and the conservation issues. You can find it at: www.life-alpilles.com

Improving our knowledge

The European programme enabled scientific monitoring to be set up. 13 species were monitored at the beginning and end of the project, using different methods adapted to each bird species, which made it possible to know the status of their populations and their trends, and to assess the impact of our actions on certain species.

More specific studies focused on the 2 large raptors found in the Alpilles (Bonelli's Eagle and the Eurasian Eagle Owl), the flagship species in this project:

- Specific monitoring of 4 pairs of Bonelli's Eagles by means of a GPS tag to define the mapping of their home ranges;
- A study of changes in the diet of Bonelli's Eagle and the Eurasian Eagle Owl (checking nests and collecting the remains of prey), in order to evaluate the potential impacts of the reintroduction of rabbits and partridges.

Breeding monitoring was conducted for other species such as the Egyptian Vulture and the Short-toed Snake Eagle.

In addition, some of our actions included local ornithological monitoring, as in the case of the test plots set up to study farming practices (9 plots observed) and the scrubland clearing work to open up habitats on 170 hectares (point-counts on 52 points).

Concrete achievements

Targeted conservation actions were carried out for other species in the field.

The European Roller, an emblematic bird of the Alpilles, benefitted from the setting up of nest boxes and the planting of White Poplar trees along temporary streams, a favourable habitat for rollers, which nest in holes in trees.

The occupation rate has increased every year, a sign that this action is successful.

Nest boxes have been installed to encourage the return of the Lesser Kestrel, which has not been seen in the territory since the 1970s.

To attract the wild birds flying through this area, in the spring of 2016 and 2017, two kestrels born in captivity were placed in a call-bird cage. In 2018, as a substitute for these live call birds, a technical bird call system was set up.

Technical partners: A Rocha, PACA Bird Protection League, PACA Natural Area Conservancy, French National Forest Office, private landowners, CRSFS Cayssesbard, Mark, Baud Stéphane.

72 nest boxes for the European Roller installed
• 14 % occupation rate in 2016
• 24 % in 2017
• 30 % in 2018

110 White Poplars planted

41 nest boxes for Lesser Kestrel



© A Rocha



Raising awareness about birds and developing tourism for birdwatchers

The LIFE Alpilles project used many channels of communication to raise awareness of different audiences about the conservation of the 13 bird species concerned. It also enabled this territory to acquire numerous tools for discovering the birds found in the Alpilles. These actions have contributed to developing and organising a brand of tourism based on birdwatching, a sector with a high economic potential for the Park whose ambition is to make the Alpilles a major birdwatching site.

Young birdwatchers

Events organised during the school day

An educational project on the birds of the Alpilles has been proposed to all primary schools in the 16 communes in the Park.

A teaching kit Birds, landscapes and people

Two copies of this kit are available for schools. Through games it enables children to learn about all kinds of bird conservation issues, and can be used by the educational staff at the Park to facilitate learning activities.

A special issue of L'OISEAU MAG junior (Bird Mag for Kids)

Devised with the PACA LPO, this magazine was distributed to five thousand 6- to 12-year old children in the Alpilles, and a special issue was sent to all subscribers.

Professionals

The tourist lodgings in the territory were given informative training about bird. In this context, 25 establishments received a bird kit that includes documentation and binoculars so they can better inform their clients.

Those who are engaged in sustainable tourism, and thus authorised to display the Valeurs Parc brand, were also made more aware about the birds in this territory. Four days of training were organised concurrently for local stakeholders.

The general public

A bird information area

An interactive exhibition on birds has been installed at the Urgonia Museum in Orgon. This area will appeal to your entire family because of its playful and educational tools such as games, models, and an interactive station.

The film Birds and people

Made by Regard du Vivant, this 30-minute film presents the issues of the LIFE Alpilles project and follows for 2 years the various achievements of this project to provide a full picture of the relations between birds, natural habitats and human activities.

Outings and talks

Outings and talks concerning bird-related issues were proposed to the general public and to local associations.

LIFE ambassadors

In the field, in teams of two from May to August, their mission focused on raising the awareness of hikers about the birds and biodiversity of the Alpilles.

Attractive signs

10 information panels presenting nature information at the natural area entrances. Along with this group of panels, there is a visitor management plan to limit the disturbance of birds (signs and vehicle-access restrictions)..



People and nature: an age-old alliance in the Alpilles—a travelling exhibition

This vividly illustrated 7-panel exhibition enables visitors to discover bird conservation issues and their close links to different sectors of activity in the Alpilles.

The «Birds of the Alpilles» hiking application

A smartphone application with which you can discover 6 birdwatching hikes in the Alpilles.

An ornithology map

This map indicates several points of birdwatching interest in the territory (10 000 copies printed).

Events

The LIFE project was presented at major events including Birdfair in the United Kingdom, and also on Nature Day, Dark Sky night, as well as Owl night, and of course at the Park's annual festival.

Specific communication tools

- A visual identity
- A leaflet that presents the LIFE Alpilles project (8000 copies printed)
- A website www.life-alpilles.com
- A Facebook page @LifeAlpilles with 1034 followers
- A newsletter (2000 copies per year)
- A special European Roller leaflet (2000 copies printed)
- Ongoing press relations
- Work in progress panels to inform hikers about the principal actions being completed in the field (creation of warrens, works to reopen habitats or replant hedges)
- Promotional items

Technical partners: PACA LPO, Lili Nature, Bureau des Guides Naturalistes (nature guides), the Urgonia Museum in Orgon, A Rocha France, Business Geografic, Kaiman, Intuitive Travel, Sons des sens

20 Birds, landscapes and people class projects: awareness-raising for nearly 500 children

13400 visitors at the bird exhibition and information area

3598 people made more aware of conservation issues by our ambassadors between 2016 and 2018

600 DVDs of the film Of birds and people

35 outings for the general public on bird issues for some 700 participants





Layman's Report of the Life Alpilles Project LIFE12 NAT/FR/000107

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